

Saturday, July 22, 2023 ◻ Read Acts 23:11–35

Questions from the Scripture text: When does v11 take place? Who stood by Paul? What did He command Paul to do? What did He say that it was necessary that Paul would do? So then what immediately happens in the morning (v12)? How many entered into this conspiracy (v13)? To whom did they come and openly tell of this determination to murder (v14)? What did they want the council to do (v15)? Who happened to hear of this (v16)? What did he do about it? To whom did Paul send him (v17)? How was the boy presented to him (v18)? How does the commander treat the lad (v19)? What information does the boy give (v20)? Then what does he do in v21? How does the commander respond (v22)? For whom does the commander call (v23)? With what complement? To go where and when? With what purpose (v24)? What does he second with the centurions (v25–26)? How does he characterize how Paul came into custody and why (v27)? How does he describe what happened after (v28–30)? How does the commander's plan go (v31–33)? What does Felix learn from him (v34)? What does Felix decide to do?

How may we conduct ourselves as servants whom God rules in His redemptive plan, rather than hindrances or enemies that He overrules? Acts 23:11–35 looks forward to the morning sermon on the coming Lord's Day. In these twenty-five verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **while God rules and overrules all things in His redemptive plan, He gives us opportunities to serve, especially through courage, kindness, honesty, and diligence.**

v11 controls all of 21:34–28:31. But right here, immediately upon the Lord telling Paul to be of good cheer, the Spirit gives us several examples of admirable qualities that the Lord uses in His providence. Sometimes by example, and sometimes by counter-example.

The courage of the nephew. The time markers in v11 and v12 bring the two plots into competition: will the Lord get Paul to Rome, or will he be the victim of more than 40 sworn assassins? But then v14 brings a new contrast. First, there is the pseudo-courage of the swearers of the murder-oath and the genuine courage of the young lad. On the one hand, the murderers are brazen indeed, freely admitting their oath to spiritual leaders in v14 and even enlisting them. But the true courage belongs to the lad, who enters the Roman barracks (v16), talks to Paul, and then talks even to the commander by himself (v18). Even in his conversation with his commander, he is not only informative (v20) but very bold (v21). Who knows what good the sovereign Lord may be pleased to do through even just one courageous child! Be courageous, dear believer. The sovereign Lord is pleased to use courageous believers.

The kindness of the commander. With multiple centurions under him, we might expect the commander to be a hard man of war. But the Spirit highlights for us the commander's gentleness even by the taking of the lad by the hand for a private word in v19. Certainly, his gentleness is a stark contrast to the murderers that form the setting for the passage. And that kindness puts him in a position to do his job well. Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit and in accordance with the law of God. And, we do not know what good fruit the sovereign Lord may be pleased to bring by it.

The dishonesty of the commander. The text does not condone the commander's dishonesty. In fact, the Spirit has intentionally narrated for us not only the timing of the commander's learning about Paul's citizenship, but even the fact that he was afraid when he heard it (cf. 22:29). So when v27 quotes how he presented the situation to Felix, it highlights just how small and self-serving the man was on this point. We know that v11 is controlling everything that happens. But those who do not have a sturdy assurance about the providence of God may be tempted to lie in order to manipulate situations. Worse, his hope in v27 was to hide one wrong that he had done, but now millions of people for thousands of years have heard of not just one but two wrongs that he had done. When all of history is known, it will recount God's glorious, sovereign redemption. But will it recount that we were truthful by His grace, or that we were dishonest from our flesh?

The diligence of the boy, the apostle, the commander, centurions, soldiers, etc. Men should be men of action. The boy takes action and tells Paul. Paul doesn't shrug his shoulders and say, "well, God is sovereign; let's let go, and let God." He takes action. The commander promptly enacts a very thorough plan. Those under his charge carry out the plan with diligence. The most heartening thing is to know that God is a God Who is always acting according to His perfect wisdom, almighty power, and boundless goodness. But men are also called to be men of action according to what wisdom, ability, and goodness that they have from the Lord. And such men serve not only their own families, churches, communities, and nations, but indeed all who are heartened by hearing of their actions. May the Lord give us to be such men, beloved reader.

In what situation do you most need to grow in courage? In kindness? In honesty? In diligence?

Sample prayer: Lord, we thank You and praise You that You rule over all things for Your own glory and our good. Please grant that Your Spirit would bear His precious fruit in us that we might be servants unto You, rather than those whose unfaithfulness or opposition You must glorify Yourself by overruling.

Suggested songs: ARP46 "God Is Our Refuge and Our Strength" or TPH256 "God Moves in a Mysterious Way"

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(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Acts 23 verses 11 through 35. These are God's words. With the following night, the lord stood by him and said be of good cheer, Paul? For as you have testified for me in jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at rome. When it was day, some of the jews banded together and bound themselves under an earth saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Now, there were more than 40 who had formed this conspiracy. They came to the chief priests and elders and said we have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed ball. Now you therefore together with the council suggests to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him.

But we are ready to kill him before he comes near. So when paul's sister's son or of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told paul then paul called one of the centurians to him and said to take this young man to the commander for he has something to tell him.

So, he took him and brought him to the commander and said, well, the prisoner called me to him and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you. Then the commander took him by the hand. Went aside. And asked him privately. What is it that you have to tell me?

And he said, the jews have agreed to ask that you bring paul down to the council tomorrow, as though, they were going to inquire more fully about him, but do not yield to them for more than 40 of them, lie, and wait for him. Men who have bound themselves by an earth that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him.

And now they are ready. Waiting for the promise from you. So the commander, let the young man depart and commanded him. Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me. And he called, for two centurion saying, prepare 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearpoint to go to caesarea at the third hour of the night and provide mounts to set pole on.

And bring him safely to Felix the governor. You wrote a letter in the following manner? Claudius lizzius 2. The most excellent governor. Felix, greetings. This man was seized by the jews and was about to be killed by them coming with the troops. I rescued him having learned that he was a Roman What i wanted to know, the

reason they accused am i brought him before their council?

I found out that he was accused concerning questions of the air law, but had done, but had nothing charged against him, deserving of death or chains. And when it was told me that the Jews lay in, wait for the man. I sent him immediately to you and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him.

Farewell Then the soldiers as they were commanded, took paul and brought him by night to end to Patrick's The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him and returned to the barracks. When they came to caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented poll to him.

And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from and we understood that he was from Salicia, he said, i will hear you when York users also have come And he commanded him to be kept, inherits protoreum. So, for the reading of god's inspired, and And errant worked.

The first verse of our passage verse 11, It really does control the entire last section of the book of romans. Uh, we had Paul testifying That the holy spirit was telling him in every city that he was going to be bound and chains. And he did not know what was going to happen after that and then in 21 verse 33, the commander commanded him to be bound and chains.

Something, he very conveniently leaves out here and it has letter Uh, makes himself to be the one who protests against the chains. Um, but with the fulfillment of of that verse 21, 34 and And, Continued rage of the mob against paul from 21:34 to the end. Of chapter 28, where the very last verse talks about paul freely preaching, jesus christ.

For years while he's in house arrest, he's in chains. About the gospel is unchained and he's testifying for christ at rome. Just as The lord tells him in verse 11 of this passage that you will have to do. And so from 21:34 to the end of chapter 28, it is a long sustained lesson in the fact, That the lord jesus is ruling history for the spread of his gospel.

Causing his testimony to come to those for whom. He has died. And whom now he will apply his redemption. By giving them faith through the hearing of the word and that is still. What is happening today? And so that's in control of the narrative. And One of the things that we have, then Uh, is a series of different events in comparisons that come in the providence of of the lord jesus, in the providence of god, as he has getting Paul to Rome.

And he's teaching us much, then about living the christian life as those who belong to jesus christ and who are serving him. Underneath his sovereign provident providence. In our passage, the big contrast is between the Um, The. Violence. Violent hysteria. Of the jews and their murderousness. And then, on the other hand, We have the way that the little boy, And paul conduct themselves, and there's a strong contrast between them.

And so we see that the holy spirit is teaching us something here. About being on. What people would call today, the right side of history. And they threaten about how people are going to remember you. And there's kind of this evolutionary Uh, aspect of the use of that phrase, by many people.

Um, that Uh, with the constant like changing morality. But, The history is not proceeding according to evolution where We will. Uh, suddenly reinterpret all of past history. According to critical theory and Um, especially critical race theory and Whether you were you a pro perversion, alphabet soup or whatever Uh no history is proceeding linearly to a point ruled by christ.

And the great concluding event of history, as christ appearing in the sky and judging all, by whether they have acknowledged, god, glorified him. As god. And whether they have obeyed, the gospel of the lord, jesus christ and belong to god, in christ by faith. Having been declared righteous and having been conformed to christ in holiness, And are prepared now to enter.

Uh, that which christ has earned for those who are his So that is where history is going and history is going to get there with us or well it is going to get there. Whatever we do. What let what remains for us is whether The events of our lives.

Are going to include especially events in which the lord sustaining us. By grace. He actually uses good qualities in us or whether Um, You know, or how much of the story of our life will be the lord over ruling? Our weakness or our wickedness. And so that's what we mean here.

By being on the right side of history. And we use. That we can even say that this way, being on the right side of redemptive history, Um, And so, one of the first things that the lord gives us as an example here as the courage of the nephew, And you can see his courage.

In that. Uh, he does hard things but he's not. Like these jews who are Uh dramatic and hysterical and trying to draw attention to themselves. It may seem like really courageous and brave and a man of action to to take a rash vow and say, i will neither eat nor drink until i have committed murder.

Uh, but that's actually not very courageous. Uh, it's it's very dramatic. Um, And it's it's very hysterical. Uh, but these men Are brash and brazen. Uh, they are proud. Arrogant before god. Not. Doing the right thing because it's right, but trusting in themselves and the force of their action.

Trusting in the forcefulness of your action is not courage, and masquerades is courage, but it is not Trusting in god and doing what is right because Uh, because you trust that god rules and overrules things. That's, that's real courage. Um, And so these men, they're so brazen. That they take their plan to commit murder to the chief priest and elders in verse 14.

It does tell you something about what they Expect of the character of the chief priests and elders. Um, but Uh, you know what a situation. The lack of justice is in. In judea and jerusalem at this point. Those who have committed themselves to murder our unabarrassed. To bring the.

The chief priests and the elders in on their plan. The nephew. Um, For his part doesn't have 40 conspirators, doesn't have the prevailing Ruling controlling party. He is a young lad and he is by himself. Now, this actually helps us think about our own cultural moment and what people call courageous Um, especially with the perversion alphabet soup people.

People say, oh well they're so courageous to come out about themselves, this is not courageous everyone. In the entire culture is celebrating them and defending them and attacking people who don't attack them. People who just say that they're wrong, get stopped into the ground, by the prevailing culture. And so there's this hysterical and modesty and brazenness and wickedness and everyone imagines that that's courageous.

When the real courageous is to be the one who is not in agreement with the prevailing wicked, who are Who are governing or the prevailing wicked, who are controlling? And and yet being the one learned voice willing to do whatever god has given us in his providence. In our place.

In this case, it happens to be poles, nephew. The son of paul sister, he hears these things and he goes into the Roman barracks. Uh, the word that's used of him as a young lad, means someone, Really maximum 11, 12 years old, you would not have been can considered Adult capable yet.

And, And yet having heard this, and knowing where Paul is, he even goes into the Roman barracks where paul is being held, which is a courageous thing all by itself. And this this little boy, not only goes into the Roman barracks, but he talks to paul and then paul.

Calls one of the centurions over and says take this young man to the commander. So now this little boy is going to talk to a commander who is over many centurions. Uh, and And not only does he talk to him, he is probably a little bit impertinent because he doesn't just give the information in verse 20, he starts giving the commander instruction first 21, he says, don't listen to them.

Uh, do not yield to the to them. Uh, you know, he maybe should have left the strategy and the procedure of what to do up to the commander. I mean, it would be a really easy way to wipe out the conspirators. Uh, and if instead of whisking Paul away during the night, he sent that force of 200 men and 200, spearmint and 70, cavalry, Um, Of course, it's not in the commander's best interests.

Uh, to have a jewish riot. That's a Uh, good way to be relieved of your command and end up in a Roman. Prison or worse. Um, but the boy Uh, does Uh, some courage here, his being on the right side of the lord helping him. And we don't know.

Uh, whether even he was Uh, converted. But he is sticking to his integrity for what, it's right. And that makes him, he's not the hero of the story. The hero of the story is the lord jesus and his sovereign rule But in god's providence and god's use of him and his courageous courage, he is a hero, he is a model to us of how those who know how history ends and no, who was ruling it now wish to conduct ourselves That though the rest of the world despise us for our conduct, we want to act in a way that the lord knows as honorable and that will be displayed before all at the last as having been Honorable.

And then the kindness of the commander. Um, he is a man of war. He is Ascended in the Roman military to the place that he is. But you see? His willingness to listen to the boy, even his manner with him, taking him by the hand, leading him aside. Privately.

Um, Encouraging him trusting him to To keep the, the Uh, secret in verse 22. I mean there's an easy way to make sure that a boy doesn't say anything. And that is to detain him until your action is done. And yet verse 22, says the commander, let the young man depart and commanded him tell.

No one that you have revealed these things to me. Almost if you're a little boy and you've been in this situation, Um, you feel like the commander has elevated you to one of his trusted troops. And so the the kindness and the thoughtfulness, Of the man. Is used by god and highlighted in the scripture and what opportunities we might have that.

You never know as a child Uh, what the lord might do. With your willingness to act courageously, and go against the prevailing flow and take risks for that, which is good, you never know. When you have an opportunity, what god may do with it to be kind, like the commander was And to be thoughtful, and gentle and elevate, someone who doesn't really have a claim upon you.

But you do have the ability. To be kind to them. And, It's not all good for the commander. He's also an example to us. Of. Um, the folly of falsehood Uh, he thought he was covering himself with felix when He wrote, you know, it was, uh, it was the jews who were about to kill him, but i had learned that he was a roman and so i intervened we know that it's not the order, it should occurred that he also makes sure to include verse 29.

I found out that he was can accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him, deserving of death. Or chains says the guy who originally, That commanded him to be put in chains and so he thought he was covering himself with felix. And well, what he's actually done is, he's exposed himself to two thousand years of his, uh, personal incident report written to this governor being included in, holy scripture and exposing That he was.

A liar and just trying to protect himself. And so he does. Although on the one hand, he's a good example. Of kindness. In his interaction with the boy, he also becomes to us an example of maintaining integrity. Um, For when all of history has laid bare and all of our actions is Late bear.

We don't want to be the ones. Who didn't trust the lord? Jesus enough to tell the truth. But thought that we had to lie in order to make an outcome better. It's uh, We want to follow god, and all of his ways. Uh, god who the scripture tells us cannot lie, because satan is the original lawyer and the father Of all lying.

And one of the great reasons that we lie, Is to protect ourselves or make ourselves look better. But you can't protect yourself by lighting or others. And you can't. Uh, make yourself look better. Because in the end, Uh, the lie will be exposed, the dishonesty of the commander. And then there's also Diligence throughout this.

Um, Throughout the passage, that is an example to us, of living, as those who are aware of wanting to be on the right side, Of redemptive history. And that's diligence is the cousin of the courage that we noted earlier. But the boy taking action upon what he knew. Uh, not Uh, not being slow or assuming that someone else will do it.

Paul's Immediately taking accident, sending the boy. Uh, to the commander but then especially Uh, the diligence of the commander in this centurions and the soldiers. Um he really outpulls out all the stops. He takes two centurions but he's actually gonna need. He speaks to two of the centurions but they're actually going to need four centurion's.

Um, because he sends Uh, Foot and 200 spearmint and probably you need another centurion for the cavalry for the 70 horsemen. So for these Um, And so for these 40 Jews who are by their own oath starving, Uh, they now have to Uh, battle 470. Uh, well equipped. Well, nourished well trained roman soldiers.

Uh, who include 200 foot men, 200, spearmen, and 40 cavalry. But in, in this diligence and this Promptness and wisdom. And he, he sends them. Uh, immediately and the middle of the night. Much can be done. By diligence. Some of The most enjoyable histories and biographies that we have, read have recounted how god uses diligence taking.

Uh, taking action not being lazy, not procrastinating. Doing what we can. And, That i know is, Something of a rebuke to us. Uh, who can be accustomed? To just doing as much as, as reasonably expected rather than Um, Taking the assignment from the lord of whatever, the providence of our situations present us and engaging.

As those who trust him and belong to him. And wants to be used by him. Even as he rules and overrules history for his redempted purpose. So, the lord give us. To be courageous and kind and honest and diligent. Uh, so that Where even when he is glorified for solemnly, ruling and overruling all things, Uh, to bring to salvation.

Those for whom he died. That he would also be exalted as the one who produced in us character that became useful. Unto his glory. In his work. Let's pray. Our father in heaven. We thank you for this message. We thank you that you don't just rule over history. Unto your praise, but you generously give us.

Even to participate in your work and to do. So in ways that honor you and show the the justice and wisdom of how you have ordered out your providence. We pray, lord that Your spirit would apply to us. The character of christ. That these things that you have made admirable.

In your wisdom, in your sovereign ordering of how the world would work. That they would come from our lives. Not just as super as External. Admirable qualities. But as the fruit of the work of christ in our hearts, Lord do this for us. We ask not that. We might be heroes.

In your story. Uh, but that we might enjoy bringing you glory. As those who are with you, On the right side of your redemptive work. Grant this, we ask in jesus name, Amen.